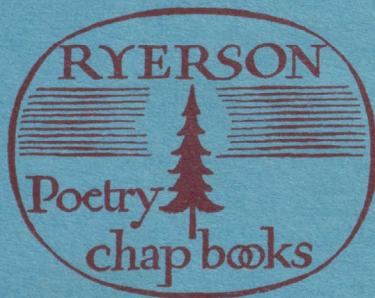

And See Penelope
Plain

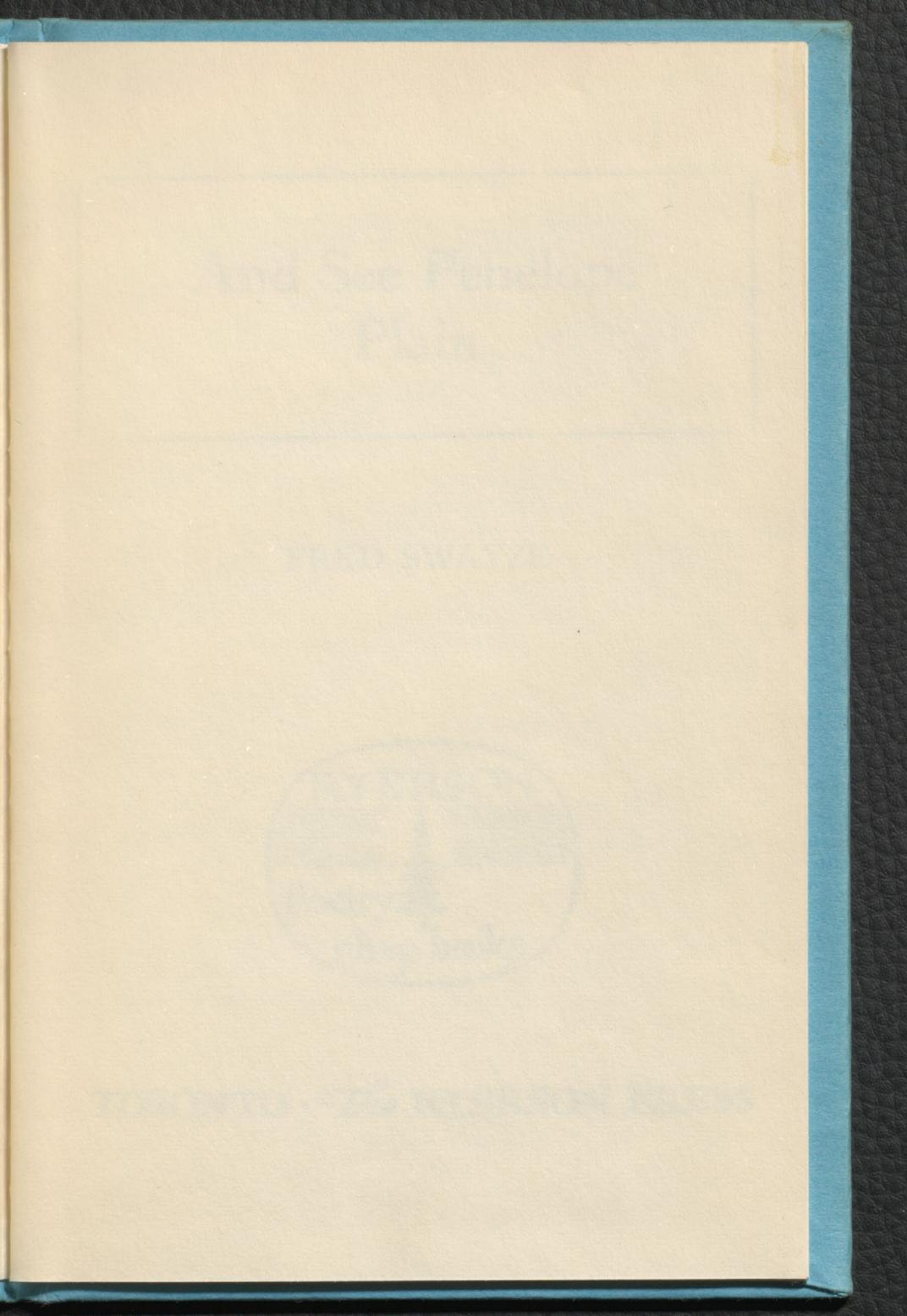
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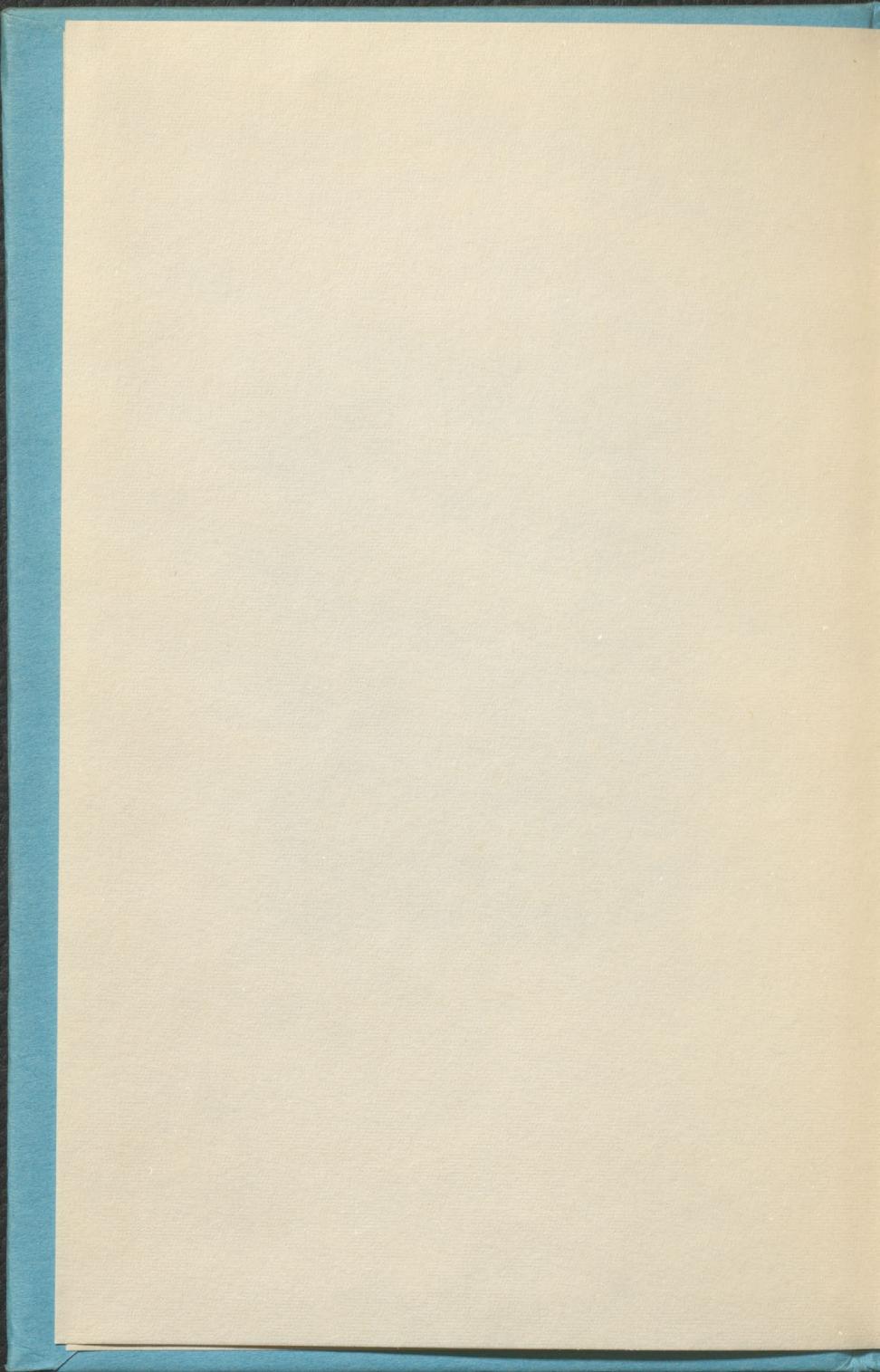


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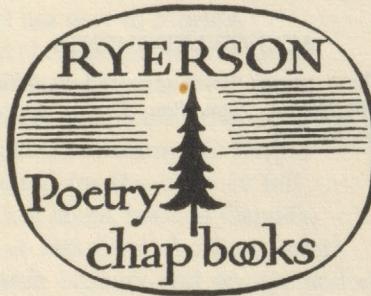
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And See Penelope
Plain

FRED SWAYZE



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OF THIS EDITION OF AND SEE PENELOPE PLAIN, BY
FRED SWAYZE, TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES
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FOR BEULAH

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most of these poems have appeared in *The Canadian Forum*, *Fiddlehead*, *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, and *The Ottawa Journal*.

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And See Penelope Plain

AND SEE PENELOPE PLAIN

PLAYING the sunshine days away,
He puttered at golf, lobbed at tennis,
Hunched over checkers with transient friends,
Was shuffle bored, and bowled his way
Up and down the continent
One jump ahead of chilly weather,
And went where all good Canadians go,
When wealthy and wise, to avoid the snow.

His wife, uprooted from her home,
Torn from her church, and girlhood friends,
Knitted her way to Florida,
Knitted through the Mardi Gras,
Knitted under pine and palm,
By checker board and bowling green.
A peripatetic Madame de Farge,
She waited for the blow to fall
To let her come back to Canada,
Freed at last from the long safari,
To church bazaars and groups and clubs
And societies, mainly missionary.

SUDDENLY AT HIS RESIDENCE

STARTLED by the summons,
He gripped the arms of his chair
With straining fingers.
Gently he settled back
Softly, without a sigh,
And was dead.
So indecisive he had been
That meekly he passed through life
Invisibly.
Death almost forgot him,
But recollecting, beckoned
Casually.

THE NORTH WIND DOTH BLOW

LEFT on a lonely island to die
The old woman does not hear the angry
Slap of driven waves on the stones
Or the moan of the pines torn by the wind
Although she holds the worn blanket
Shawl-like close against the cold
And stares blindly over the gray lake
Her eyes filmed with the milky iridescence
Of great age, blind with the tears of weakness.
After the pain will come resignation.
After the bitterness and crying
Will come the quiet. Old, old,
And at last a burden to her people,
Left to die in a hungry year
When the tribe moved to the winter camp.

Hidden in a shabby genteel home
For the aged, a Victorian mansion crumbling
With dry rot on a pseudo respectable street
Convenient to street car and subway
Reasonable rates five dollars a day
The old ladies stay meekly in their rooms
Reasonably cold, reasonably starved
Apathetic to the dullness and dust
The dirt and the musty smell of weakness.
Out of sight and out of mind, their world
A chair, a bed and a bureau drawer
They sit quietly, decently dying.

The thin bitter wind that rattles
The black branches of the respectable maples
Is all that is left of a northern blast
That swept over forests, mountains and gray lakes
And roared in the pines of lonely islands.

CAEDMON, SING ME SOMETHING OF THE NATIONAL POTENTIAL

"This is precisely what I mean by most of our poets not taking advantage of the national potential. There is something in the national climate today that will leave its mark on any truly sensitive writer's work. I believe that it can be felt and recognized and yet I hardly ever find it in our poetry."

James Scott, in the *Ottawa Journal*, Dec. 26, 1953.

GREAT Scott! How insensitive can a poet get?
And will John Fisher be our laureate yet?
Of what men shall our Canadian Virgils sing,
Aberhart, Henry Holt, and Mackenzie King?

Or shall we discuss apartness with a Negro in Dresden,
Inviolable rights with a Japanese Canadian,
Brotherly love with a Jew buying a cottage,
Independence and a mess of American pottage?

I'll compose you a sonnet, dear James, with maple leaves
on it,

An ode on combines, discreetly, in the modern mode,
A triplet gracefully limning Houde as a violet,
An epic on Duplessis and the liquor traffic,
An epigram on the Star and Telegram,
A terza rima on Chalk River and Hiroshima,
A lyric on Social Credit, a panegyric
On wages in bargain basements, a squib for sages
Who serve on Royal Commissions and deserve
What they get. I'll write you a rondeau, lest we forget
Company towns and the nation's economy.
We can tunnel a mountain, drain a lake, and funnel
A river for power, lay down a pipe line and give her
The gas, or build a sky scraper in concrete and glass.

A poet can lord it grandly from Border to Pole,
And what shall it profit him, if he lose his own soul?

THE DROWNING

GRAY green water surged and swept
Boiling and swirling under the ledge
Of waxen ice that it sullenly lipped,
Smoothing and blunting the jagged edge.

A crusted rim of crumbling slush
Grayly edged the widening stain
That girdled the ragged open wound
Star-fracturing the river plain.

Sighing, the tired wind stooped to the snow,
Slowly whirling a spiral that lifted,
Floated, a smoke-gray phantom, to go
Fading and thinning as it drifted.

The terrified child who was left alone,
Frightened by silence, wide of eye,
Turned from the river towards his home,
And as he ran began to cry.

O GOD! O OTTAWA!

"Ottawa, the Federal capital, exercises no cultural influence at all; it is simply a rookery of civil servants . . . Once the talented and ambitious young writer has realized how stultifying is the narrow environment to which he is committed, he begins to long for London."

—from an article in The Literary Supplement of *The London Times*.

LONDON calling. Big Ben booms through the fog.
"The Thunderer" has spoken with the voice of God
And Ottawa trembles. The National Gallery glooms
Darkly behind its Windsor Castle façade.
The Film Board, mindful of the grandeur of the dooms
Of the valiant dead whispers hoarsely, "Is that bad?"
And decamps to Montreal. The CBC
Withers and dies, and is sold to private stations;
Television grows like the green bay tree.
The anonymous civil servants who write the Nation's
Speeches, pamphlets, booklets and throw-aways
Bear up to this note of customary praise;
But poets are stricken, novelists sicken, and music
Hath a dying fall. The stage *is* sick.

A good job done, the *Times'* critic, worthy wight,
Elegant in spats, walks forth to dine
On cold boiled mutton, two veggies, and gooseberry tart
With bilious custard—and it damn well serves him right!

TORONTO

CITY of contrasts, city of the cold shoulder,
Hog town, divisional point, and Hub of Empire,
They tell me you want to be loved, and I believe them;
Some of the nicest people live quietly there.
They tell me you are big, and I believe them
After journeys jammed in crowded cars and subway.
Unlike the amoeba, you grow without dividing;
Saturn-like, you devour the children you spawn.
They tell me you are wicked, and I believe them,
Though I walked down Jarvis Street and nothing
happened.

Mere size creates the ills that a city is heir to,
And your sins of omission stink in the nostrils of God.
You seek to atone for indifference by giving monies
To the Fresh Air Fund, by giving five loaves and two
fishes
To the Scott Mission and the Salvation Army Hostels,
Expecting them to perform the miracle of charity;
By Sunday sports to please the malcontents.

O God! O Toronto! Too many skyscrapers,
Too few street-cleaners. While the morning-coated ushers
Reap the harvest at Timothy Eaton Memorial,
The derelicts scavenge the curbs at Queen and Yonge.
The girls of Havergal and the York Knitting Mills,
The Beanery Gang and Tron-o Varsity
Do not play in the same league or ever meet in the play-
downs.

The eddying winds, trapped in the canyon maze
Of unfriendly grimy walls, swirl and scatter
The debris and litter that hurrying crowds grind
To a gritty dust. The open drain of the dirty Don
Is camouflaged by willows and one lone gull.

QUEEN'S PARK: 8 a.m.

A SUDDEN storm cloud of pigeons
dull blue and sullen gray
settled about the feet
of the derelict on the bench.
Deliberately he broke
bread into bits which he threw
with calculated fairness
as though he were St. Francis
preaching a gospel of crumbs.
Then he folded his coat for a pillow,
put his feet on the bench and slept.
Decently screened by shrubs
the caretakers burned the litter,
that the eyes of hurrying men
might not be reproached and offended
by the waste of yesterday.

WITHIN OUR GATES

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in."—*St. Matthew.*

ALLOCATE the D.P.'s. Teach them respect
For Canada. If they start to bellyache,
Let them go back where they came from. Here they make
A damn good thing of it! What do they expect?

Set the scholar ploughing. Hand a shovel
To the violinist, and pick-axe, saw and hammer
To the lawyer and engineer on construction jobs.
Turn the mechanic loose on milking machines.
Intern the surgeon; apprentice the journeyman;
Bind out the farm boys; indenture the stenographers
And concert artists to domestic service. The price
Of Canadian citizenship is sweated labour.
The vote is an Indian gift in exchange for corvée
By the Wops, Bohunks, Squareheads, Polocks and Kikes.

SMALL-TOWN EDITOR

ACQUAINTED with saints, confessor of publicans,
Privy to all the hopes and fears of Council,
He is not ungrateful for felony and crimes
Contrary to the laws of God and man.
As sensitive to alarm as collie or gander,
If wounded, he bleeds printer's ink in an agony
Of editorial passion that rouses the blood.
Jubilant, he lavishes adjectives
With the actor's flair for flamboyance. Hailed the fellow
Of odd fish, old timers, boosters and advertisers,
He charges the transient with significance
And the trivial with portentousness. He is
The town crier, public conscience, and sentinel,
Pledged to love and honour, obey and tell.

POPPY

THE poppy flaunts her harlotries
with painted face
to entertain the casual bees
outface the sun and mock the breeze
with sinuous grace.
The hectic in her cheek
the wages due
the mortal moralist
for scarlet sin and naughty deeds
As though the gaudy poppy knew
that the dry rattle of black seeds
within the pelvic cage
outlasted good and evil and the rage
of philosophies.

SPRING SONG

SPRING, Spring, profligate Spring,
Is a walloping trollop with breasts aswing,
Splay-footed, squelching the mud through her toes,
Lustily laughing as Northward she goes
Yanking the blankets from shivering grasses,
Slapping the maples and elms as she passes.

Wholeheartedly pagan, amused and exhorting,
She spreads the contagion of vigorous courting.
The sluttish and ruttish replenish the earth;
The profile in fashion is matronly girth.
Her boldly emblazoned heraldic crest
Is a tiptoe cockerel thumping his chest.

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

SUMMONED home, I saw in the wasted face
The bony prominence of the common skull
Stretching the skin, the dry white strands of hair
About the hollow temples, the fallen jaw
And sunken eyes, as though the stained brown linen
Had been cut away from Nefertiti's head
Baring the desert devastation of Egypt,
Brittle death beneath the golden mask.

On Darien between eternities,
A lost Atlantis and the pacific wasteland,
As though from the dust, her amused voice said,
"If they would let me alone, I would soon be better
And be out of here in two shakes of a dead lamb's tail."

Here, Nefertiti, is immortality!

DIVINE UNREST

THE life that begins at forty
is not L'Allegro's golden mean,
serene, untroubled by prostate,
ulcers, thinning hair, sclerosis,
and premonitions of fate.
That restless yearning, in my diagnosis,
is not a second renaissance
or recurrence of adolescence
but good old-fashioned divine unrest,
the urge to do something before it is too late.

By fifty, a man to be blest
must wrestle with the recording angel
though his thigh and times be out of joint
and write his testament of protest

against the anonymity
and conformity of death
and reject, to make his point,
senility as a welcome opiate.

I would rather draw a bison
on a cave wall in Auvergne,
carve a totem pole,
beat a magic drum
until the rains come,
sing a song of sixpence,
make yet another book,
preach to St. Francis' birds,
or find heaven in a grain of sand,
than be a televised entertainer
gladiating bemusement,
a tycoon, an industrial magnet
for mass-man's dollars,
a robot executing
whatever executives execute,
a cog, a round peg in a round hole,
a cipher, a non-entity
registered without a protest.

The creative urge is a fire
that burns without consuming the bush.
A symbol of man's desire
it rages like a fever,
and though better never late
is better late than never.

PEDAGOGICAL REFLECTIONS

A

THOUGH teachers welcome gifted children
As fellow creatures,
May the God of gifted children send
Them gifted teachers.

B

The dancing genes defeat the schemes
Of best planned parenthood.
Nature's affinity for the mean
Strains our fortitude.

C

What a bother
When the child of a University Woman
Takes after its father!

EDUCATION IS A RACE

EDUCATION is a race.

The Kremlin is hammering at the door.
A Russian's grasp now exceeds his reach—
Or what's a guided missile for?

"Throw the children into the breach.
Why let the Communists set the pace?
Cut out the fads and frills and teach
The science we need for total war.
This is urgent,"

said the executive to the scientist
concocting sky-blue-pink detergent.

"Pile on the work, lest the Russians reap
A red harvest with a sickle moon.
Why halve the cake we want to eat?
Cut out the Shakespeare and save a year,"

said the politician to the engineer
designing the chromium trim to make
next year's model obsolete.

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